

Physical Degeneracy of American Women.

BY MOSES T. RUNNELS, M.D.

KANSAS CITY, MO.

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Health is the first requisite for a life of usefulness and happiness. It is the foundation of the noblest womanhood and manhood. The mind is affected by the body, and a soul lodged in a diseased and suffering frame can not achieve the highest usefulness. The laws of health, therefore, must be obeyed if woman is to occupy the exalted place for which she was designed. The best gift a parent can transmit to a child is a "sound mind in a sound body." The ability of a woman to meet the demands made upon her is measured by the amount of vitality in store. The Creator may endow her with a good constitution, but that constitution must be taken care of if she is to perform well her life duties. The vitality may be destroyed gradually or suddenly. Every time a law is violated the health suffers. The majority of females who reach maturity enter upon the marriage state. The highest ambition of the average woman is to marry well. This is all right if the preparation for the life work has

been such as to make her capable of performing maternal duties. The preparation for marriage is lacking in physical training in the great majority of instances.

A distinguished writer says: "The great danger of our day is forcing the intellect of woman beyond what her physical organization will possibly bear. We put our daughters at school at six and expect to have their education completed at eighteen—the average girl would be mortified not to be through with her schooling by the time she reaches that age. In these years the poor thing has her brain crowded too much." A writer says that out of 705 female college graduates recently communicated with, only 196 are married. Of the 196 married, 66 have had no children and the remaining 130 have had 263 children, 232 of which are living. Thus it seems that "higher education" in women, desirable though it be, so far has not conduced to connubiality and fecundity. A full physical development is the foundation of usefulness and happiness in married life. The fact that girls are often dwarfed, nervous, ailing and delicate is due largely to their mode of dress and habits of living. If the clothing does not allow free use and full expansion of all the parts of the body the girl cannot be expected to arrive at the best developed womanhood and the parts of the body not used must be dwarfed and suffer deformity. If a man marry a so-called society girl the result will be more often than otherwise that her weakness and physical degeneracy will make her anything else but a companion and helpmeet; and disappointment and unhappiness

on both sides may be expected. As an evidence that American women are degenerating physically, I will quote a few passages from good authorities. Dr. Nathan Allen, of Lowell, Mass., says: "Our New England women have for two or three generations been passing through important physical changes. We do not find in them that largeness of size, that fullness of outline, that harmony of proportion and physical strength which existed in their mothers and grandmothers. Our young women as a general thing have not been trained up to housework or physical exercise of any kind that develops and strengthens the muscles and gives power of endurance. At the same time the sympathetic and sanguine temperaments are not developed in proportion to the nervous. This disproportion operates unfavorably upon the maternal relations." Another writes: "Why do American-born females make such poor wet-nurses compared with the immigrant from Ireland or Germany? After nearly thirty years of practice I cannot answer the question. That it is a fact, few practitioners in our cities and large towns doubt. Allow that some women with us, as with foreigners, object to being bound to their children's call, yet the mass of American females are totally unable to act the wet-nurse with success." Dr. H. D. Chapin, of New York, says: "It is sometimes observed that advancing civilization is particularly hard on women. While the exact truth of this statement can only be verified by an extensive and exhaustive study of statistics the rapid growth of gynæcology, together with the increased difficulty and

danger so frequently attending the delivery of children, certainly seem to point toward a tendency to physical degeneracy in women. As a high state of civilization appears to exhaust women physically in order to advance them mentally it is not strange that the more cultured women, who have the means to correctly train children are just the ones who cannot or will not have them." One physician says: "It's no use talking. A wife that is not physically a woman cannot make a man happy," and another old physician observes that "not one girl in fifty of marriageable age is of marriageable health." Another said that "the sickness of wives in directions peculiar to their sex is one great source of unhappiness in married life—is often the cause directly or indirectly of many divorces."

It is admitted that girls between the ages of ten and twenty pass the most critical period of their lives and in this formative period lay the foundations for healthful maturity or life-long suffering. What woman can say she is as well to-day as she was before she was ten years old?

It is a remarkable fact that the productivity of American women is on the decline and that the interference with the function of conception is very prevalent. The majority of women seem anxious to know how to prevent conception, and vaginal douches and rubber contrivances of various kinds have been devised to meet the demands.

Women, and men, too, for that matter, are constantly searching for some method of congress unattended with the risk of impreg-

nation. Sexual frauds either of one kind or another find their way into the great majority of houses. Many men sin as did Onan, who was slain for resorting to one of the "preventive measures" in vogue at this day. Dr. Wm. Goodell says: "So irreparable is the moral and physical degradation resulting from these vicious sexual relations, so damaging are they to good health and to good morals, so fatal to national prosperity, that I cannot go far astray in assaulting them with every available weapon. The wife suffers the most because she both sins and is sinned against. She sins because she shirks those responsibilities for which she was created. She is sinned against, because she is defrauded of her rights. By incomplete coition arise engorgements, erosions and displacements of the uterus accompanied by mental and physical manifestations." The demands of fashion first and at any cost must be satisfied, and just here the conflict commences. From the time the girl "enters society" the effort is made to follow as closely as possible all the requirements of fashion, and the laws of physiology and maternity are matters of secondary importance. The laws of nature are too frequently carelessly disregarded by the young lady who "shines in society." Her wardrobe is made more for display than for comfort and health. High heeled and tight shoes have much to do with the ill health of women. The elevation of the heels throws the axis of the spinal column forward and the natural equilibrium of the body is destroyed. The viscera are forced into new positions and all the organs

of the body are subject to more or less tension. This forced and abnormal attitude long continued is productive of nervous exhaustion and displacements of the uterus and other organs.

From an experience of twelve years in the practice of medicine, the writer has been convinced that grave evils have grown out of the violation of physiological laws. The best interests of society are in jeopardy. It is the special duty of the practitioners of medicine to teach people how to live in accordance with physiological principles, and do all in their power to prevent sickness and death. However, it is a noteworthy and sad fact that doctors are very remiss in their duties, and more than half their opportunities for the correction of the evils which threaten the best interests of society are lost.

Physicians as a rule are not wide awake or progressive. Against many of them the charge of ignorance and the overpowering love of money can be made and maintained. The doctor who is *en rapport* with his profession is keenly alive to his duties and responsibilities and loses few opportunities to point out the dangers to life. But what shall be said of the mountebanks, shallow pretenders in medicine and legalized doctors with battered reputations, who secure their greatest gains by deception and the violation of moral and physiological principles?

Their poverty of medical knowledge is only equaled by their audacity and falsity. The less they know of medicine the more do they obtrude themselves on the public, until every intelligent citizen is daily insulted by their

glaring, false and immoral advertisements in the newspapers, on the sidewalks and on the fences. The public understand that these medical advertisers are unscrupulous and not bound by moral restraints. When skillful and conscientious physicians refuse to produce abortion they are quickly told that there are those at hand who will do it for money, and too often the honest and law-abiding physician learns later on that the wicked and ruinous deed has been accomplished by somebody—the patient alone may be guilty or one or more persons may have assisted her. To prove who are the guilty ones or to find out whether it were truly caused by accident is the “rub.”

The law seems to be sufficiently severe upon those who are proved guilty of abortion, but not more than one in a thousand of the guilty ones are ever brought to trial. It is safe to say that there are many women in the upper walks of life who have been guilty one or more times of having intentionally interrupted pregnancy and laid thereby the foundation for physical bankruptcy; and there are many physicians who bear in their respective communities the reputation of learning and skill who have not only given an attentive ear to the wicked pleadings of society women who prefer the fruits of sin to motherhood, but have prostituted all their abilities for money and actually committed murder!

If that which is covered could be revealed, what a commotion there would be among the women and the doctors! Long ago it was taught that “the wages of sin is death,” and any interference with the process of concep-

tion is followed by irreparable damage to the constitution of the woman. We are fast drifting upon the rocks.

Prosperity and wealth seem to drive us farther into danger. Intemperance and unchastity go hand in hand and take our cities by storm.

The wrecks of women everywhere should prompt us to a thorough investigation of the causes which have wrought such sad results. The evidences of dry-rot in American life have begun to appear. Large families are no longer fashionable. They are too much care and trouble to those who did not fully realize the responsibilities of marriage and whose hearts are set upon dress and luxury. The condition of the exchequer often has too much to do with the limitation of families among the poor, and the wealthy often become either physically disabled to bear children or so depraved by luxury and ease that they shun all domestic duties which bring self-denial. In Rome the father of a numerous family was entitled to certain gifts and privileges. All the civil and social laws of the Jewish commonwealth tended to the elevation of women and the cultivation of domestic life. In Germany the first duty that society demands of the young man is to secure a wife and establish the foundation for the home and the family. He does not try to evade this duty, as his success in life is largely dependent upon it.

Divorces are almost unknown in Germany. In America the "growing evil" is the opposite of this German custom, and we find our young and middle-aged men indefinitely post-

poning marriage, and in the meantime giving themselves up to the fullest gratification of their animal passions, regardless of the Scriptures or the laws of the land, or even common decency. Married men often do not hesitate to trample their marriage vows under their feet; to give themselves over entirely to their beastly instincts; to ruin the health and happiness of their wives, and lastly to apply for a divorce as a natural result of their abandoned and Godless lives. The busy practitioner of medicine knows full well that the picture is not overdrawn and that the physical degeneracy of the weaker sex has its foundation largely in the licentiousness of the stronger.

“’Tis true, ’tis true ’tis pity,
And pity ’tis, ’tis true.”

The women who become the easy prey of the wolves who prowl around every large city not only lose their virtue, but soon lose their health and later the ability to transmit offspring. If the sub-stratum of American so-called society could be turned to the light, a chapter nearly as horrible as the disclosures of the *Pall Mall Gazette* in London would be revealed. Let the disclosures commence at Washington, D. C., and the rottenness of men from the least to the greatest, with a few honorable exceptions, would seriously threaten the overthrow of our government.

One thing is sure. God did not make woman for the gratification of man's lust. Could every man be depended upon for "a good moral character," it is certain that one great cause of the physical degeneracy of women would be removed. If men would

not encourage such extravagance in the dress of women above what is necessary for comfort and health, it would not be long before fashion would be turned from its present course into the channel which would please the men. If men would refuse to marry women who wear corsets, how long would it be before corsets would be "out of fashion"? It is a well-known fact among women that men have great weaknesses and among the greatest of these may be mentioned the love of extravagance in the dress of women. If a woman has natural beauty she is fortunate, but whether she is beautiful or not, the attempt is always made to cover the defects of the body by the corset, a fine dress and considerable padding.

With some men a beautiful face and a fine dress go farther than good health and common sense, and this defect in their nature often produces the most disastrous results. This tendency to ornamentation and unhealthy habits of dress have come down to us from remote times, and men are responsible to a large degree for its continuance. In 1780 Miss Frampton wrote: "My sister, Phillis Wollaston, now between sixteen and seventeen, was beginning to be produced a little in the world. At that time everybody wore powder and pomatum; a large triangular thing called a cushion, to which the hair was frizzed up with three or four enormous curls on each side; the higher the pyramid of hair, gauze, feathers and other ornaments was carried, the more fashionable it was thought, and such was the labor employed to rear the fabric that nightcaps were made in proportion to it and covered over the hair,

immensely long black pins—double and single—powder, pomatum and all, ready for the next day. I think I remember hearing that twenty four large pins were by no means an unusual number to go to bed with on your head.” “The perfection of figure, according to the then fashion, was the smallness of the circumference into which your unfortunate waist could be compressed, and many a poor girl hurt her health very materially by trying to rival the reigning beauty of that day, the Duchess of Rutland, who was said to squeeze herself to the size of an orange and a half.” Girls have repeatedly been told of the harmful effects of tight lacing and the dangers from wearing corsets, yet the practice goes on and it is almost impossible to find a woman who does not wear a corset, or her clothing as a general thing altogether too tightly. It is thought that this custom has a good deal to do with “female weaknesses.” Napoleon Bonaparte said of the corset: “This wear, born of coquetry and bad taste, which murders women and ill treats their offspring tells of frivolous tastes and warns me of an approaching decadence.” Joseph II., of Austria, made a law confining the use of the corset to abandoned women. The last king of France said: “Once you met Dianas, Venuses or Niobes; nowadays only wasps.”

The editor of the *Medical Record* tells the following incident: “The great naturalist Cuvier was walking one day, with a young lady who was a victim of tight lacing, in a public garden in Paris. A lovely blossom upon an elegant plant drew from her an expression of admiration. Looking at her pale thin face, Cuvier said: ‘You were like this

flower once: to-morrow it will be as you are now.' Next day he led her to the same spot and the beautiful flower was dying. She asked the cause. 'This plant,' replied Cuvier, 'is an image of yourself. I will show you what is the matter with it.' He pointed to a cord bound tightly around the stem and said: 'You are fading away in the same manner under the compression of your corset and you are losing by degrees all your faithful charms, just because you have not the courage to resist this dangerous fashion.' "

Sir Astley Cooper, in describing the growth of the mammary gland from puberty to adult life, strongly disapproves of any compression being made on the waist or the chest of the girl, as that restraint interferes with the proper development of that organ. But this admonition from such high authority is not regarded.

If any one wants to know how generally this caution is unheeded, let a visit be made to the high school of any city or town where all the girls from twelve years old and upward are found wearing corsets and dressing tightly. It is a well known fact that all the dressmakers have a mania for recommending closely-fitting corsets and uncomfortably tight dresses. Indeed, if fashion were followed strictly according to the plates we find in *Harper's Bazaar*, *New York Fashion Bazaar*, *Young Ladies' Journal*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, etc., our women would be transformed into wasps, and wholly disqualified for marriage and maternity.

The fondness of the ordinary young woman for dress, society and amusements more than counterbalance her love for domestic af-

fairs and her physical well-being. The "beautiful low neck," a bust of something more than ordinary proportions and a closely-fitting corset constitute the *sine qua non* on a "hop evening" at a seaside hotel, or at a grand ball in any large city. The fact that more than ten thousand gross of nursing bottles are annually sold in the United States proves that something is wrong with the mammary glands of the mothers in this country.

The editor of the *Medical Record* very truthfully remarks that "there can be no doubt whatever that the true and essential function of these glands at the present day is ornamental and æsthetic. Their noblest opportunities are not in the 'milky way,' but in the line of high art and realistic delineation. They are functionally at their best when they are being painted in strong lights and shadows, photographed by a patent process and exhibited in our shop windows for the education of the masses."

The aversion to pregnancy and family cares, and the love of display and ornamentation in dress, undermine the virtues on which the strength of womanhood is based. There ought to be a fierce protest against the luxuries of the age to combat the growing tendency to enervation in both men and women. The passion for dress, ornaments, the indulgence of the appetites and other pleasures which pamper the body are a great hindrance to our advancement in physical development and morality. We ought to study Greek art more. The artists of Greece represented all that the mind can conceive of the beauty of the human form—in man the perfection of

physical strength and in woman the unapproachable loveliness of grace of form. John Lord tells us that "in the sculptures of the Greeks we see the utmost perfection of the human form, both of man and woman, learned by the constant study of anatomy of nude figures of the greatest beauty." What is more beautiful than nature? Have the corset and the modern dressmaker improved upon the work of God and added anything to the beauty and physical development of woman? Let the wives and mothers answer. Mental culture must not take precedence of physical culture, but they should go hand in hand. There needs to be a genuine reform in the dress of girls and in their habits of living. When this is brought about the "higher education of women" will not be a bar to connubiality and fecundity. Let the "higher education" of women go on, but change the curriculum so that it shall include more of physiology, anatomy and all the requirements for the greatest physical development of women.

Teach the girls that the corset and tight dressing are the enemies of life, and that a reform in dress based upon common sense and physiological principles is the greatest need of the age. The corset is an invention of remote times "to support and correct the figure of woman." It was born in vanity and ignorance and has secured and retained its grip on women because of vanity and a want of knowledge of their bodies.

Dr. Allen states that the birth rate of our strictly American is not half as large as it was fifty or sixty years ago and is now the lowest of any civilized people on the globe. Every

doctor knows that the manufacture and sale of nursing bottles and infant foods have grown enormously within the last decade, and with this astonishing increase in the artificial methods of nursing children the maternal instinct seems to have grown less and the death rate of infants has rapidly increased. About one-third of our population is foreign by birth or parentage, and this foreign population is most in the northern half of the United States. In Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts forty-three per cent. is born of foreign parentage. The large majority of births in this country occur in the families of Irish, Scotch, English, German and other foreign races and in the families of ignorant and poor Americans. Is it any wonder that socialism is gaining ground on the United States? Is it not time that we should find out what is the matter with our educated and accomplished Americans? Their tendency seems to be toward no family and no home life. In the language of Thomas K. Beecher, "a family without children is *housed* but *homeless*. The houses of cities grade up from slums, tenement houses, boarding houses, hotels, flats, residences, mansions and palaces. I am at a loss to determine in which grade to look for families, and consequent homes, after the divine intent." The "housed" yet "homeless" classes are on the increase.

Man without woman or woman without man is not a unit in this world. Either alone is a vulgar fraction. The two must accompany each other. It is expected that the union shall be according to the divine law and that

the family *shall grow*. Everything depends upon the family. It must be guarded from the wolves without and from the tendencies to destruction within. Fashion is the influence that holds the languid, bedizened and frivolous mothers, wives and daughters in slavery, while the fathers, husbands and sons are scrambling for wealth and power. School boards, faculties and public and private teachers should adopt the rule that no girl shall attend school who wears a corset. Let the girls have all the fresh air and outdoor exercise that is now allowed to the boys. Let the doctors give more attention to the prevention of disease. Let lawyers and good people join hands to suppress vice, abrogate divorce laws and elevate the family. Let religious teachers plow up the substratum of society as Christ and his apostles did, and not be satisfied to utter commonplace exhortations from the pulpit in which "poverty of thought is hidden in pretty expressions, and the waters of life are measured out in tiny gill cups, and even then diluted by weak platitudes."

God speed the day when women shall be emancipated from the bondage to fashion and the ignorant prejudices of men, and when women shall not be obliged to pledge their lives, their fortunes or their sacred honor to maintain the self-evident truths that they should be free, equal with men in every walk of life, and are endowed with certain inalienable rights, such as life, liberty and the pursuit of medicine, law, theology, literature, merchandise, domestic life and happiness, regulated by the law of free competition and the survival of the fit.